History of Missions in the Western District of N. York State

The western district of N. Y. State, including according to the legislative arrangement of 1810, 23 counties - about ½ of the square territory & a little more than ⅓ of the population of the whole state - i.e. about 23.000 square miles & 360.000 inhabitants - The population of this tract in 1800 was 130.000 - & that between the years 1800 & - it almost trebled its inhabitants - since that period the tide of emigration has been considerably diverted by openings in the more Western States still however the large tracts yet unappropriated & the liberality of the legislature in providing schools turnpikes & other public conveniences invite

have invited a great many settlers to this district within the last 10 years. At the present time its population may be safely estimated at 200.000

The country is mostly level, of rich soil, the hills & the thick with timber & when cleared afford fine pasture — the vallies when cultivated produce wheat, hemp flax & Indian corn — of the commodities produced from cultivation wheat is the principal — of which it perhaps raises a greater quantity than any district of like extent in the U.S. It is watered abundantly by lakes Erie, Ontario Cayuga Seneca Onion Oswegatchie Canandaigua & several smaller ones with their tributary rivers, the principal of which are the St Lawrence, Niagara, Genesee Chenango Oswego Oswegatchie & Black

River – besides the Mohawk Susquehannah & Delaware which have an Eastern course –

The whole state is intersected by a ridge of mountains & the climate of the Western Section is the most temperate –

The Western D. is 230 miles in length & about 100 in mean breadth the most easterly point being at Sandy Hill & the most Westerly 300 miles from the city of Albany –

The sources from which I have compiled this sketch, are the journals of a few missionaries & the reports of a few missionary Societies – which are very scanty in the light which they throw upon the general subject & scattered as to the dates & places to which they refer – A regular history of missionary operations in this district, however desirable

4 cannot be furnished - However
I will endeavour to furnish my frag-
ments into an aggregate, & let them
tell what they can of ~~the~~ past - though
my principal design ~~shall be~~ is to shew
what ground is left for future cul-
tivation, & the encouragement wh.
those places hold out to the ~~~~ labourer

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Thirty one years ago, there was only
Presbytery in the state of N. J - When
other Presbyteries were formed or
how ~~the~~ these waste places were built up
I have no means of ascertaining - But
in regard to the N. Dist. wh. is one
half of the state - I can say that its
Senior Presbytery is only in its 13th
year, having been formed in 1805.
& that prior to that date 2/3 of the
N. D. was a Missionary Field -
The settlements in this District com-
menced soon after the peace of '83 -
by families, chiefly from Connecticut -
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As they were occasionally visited by their friends, some of whom were ministers of the Gospel & as they in turn visited their native state, they made frequent complaints of their destitute condition in regard to religious ordinances— These complaints ~~powerfully~~ excited the sympathy of the friends of religion, & so early as 1788 ~~some attempts were~~ certain were made ~~to~~ for the partial supply of the new settlements— The first plan adopted was this — An association of neighbouring ministers would themselves supply the pulpit of one of their number who would labour several weeks amongst their destitute brethren— This remedy was found very inadequate & in 1792. the plan of a missionary Soc. was drawn up by the Rev Dr Edwards & adopted by the friends & Proprietors of Con—

6 In Oct. of the same year 1792 the Association petitioned the Legislature of Connecticut to permit an annual contribution to be made by the congregations for the support of the new settlements. At the contribution in the Spring of 1793 the Association rec'd between 2 & 3 hundred dollars. This sum has been gradually increased & in the year 1814 it amounted to 4000 dollars. The Soc. has rec'd handsome donations from individuals, & the profits of the Panoplist Magazine for 7 years from 1800 to 1807 made a great addition to the permanent fund which in 1815 amounted to more than 30,000 Dls when they had in their employ 30 missionaries — I would remark here that this Soc. is the oldest of the kind in the United States except the Society for propagating the Gospel amongst the Indians & others in N. America — which was instituted at Boston in 1787 —

In June 1793 the Association appointed 8 missionaries for N. York & Vermont — among whom was Dr Edwards — and at this time according to the best calculations I can make there must have been in the District 60 or 70,000 who were as sheep without a shepherd. That such a vast Xn Society

should be so destitute of Christs privileges will not seem strange, unaccountable. if we consider the manner in wh. they settled that country. They were not the surplus population of N. England sent off by its mother country in the form of regular colonies — they did not come in tribes or communities to occupy a particular territory & there to unite in the prosecution of a common interest but they came as individual adventurers & planted themselves some on the cheapest & others on the most fertile soil — some occupying 50 & others 500 acres — according to their means — thus making a scattered population, & rendering a union for ecclesiastical purposes impracticable — Besides it must be supposed that many of the emigrants came rather to make an speculation of the soil than to settle it — & held their lots as the present settlers of Illinois. by lease from a few extensive landholders —

A large part of this district was originally military land — A tract of 171 miles in length & 10 in breadth was separated by the N. J. Legislature as a gratuity for gratuitous distribution among the officers & soldiers of the line of that state — This was divided into 25 townships of 80.000 acres each which were again subdivided into 100 convenient farms of 800 acres. making in the whole 2.500 farms — These were bought up by monied men & sold or leased to the N. England emigrants — Another tract westward of the last of 2.200.000 acres was was bought in 1789 by Messrs Gorham & Phelps — This. I think is at present the property of the settlers — A still larger tract of 90 miles square, the purchase of a company of Hollanders. as it yet goes by their name, is probably in their hands till this day — The two last purchases composing the greater part of what was called the Genesee country, contained in 1790. 900 inhabitants & in 10 years afterward 17000 —

I have some letters & extracts ~~from~~ letters from Missionaries in the employ of the Connecticut & other societies - of various dates between the years 1800 & 1819 - I have selected from them such incidents as relate to the dispositions of the people towards Missionaries - their destitute condition in regard to ordinances - their progress in the organization of churches, & the settlement of ministers - & the state of experimental religion -

The first account of the state of Rel. in these parts is contained in a letter from Otsego & Delaware Cos. wh. form the Eastern boundary of the district & is dated July 1800. After alluding to a revival in the Genesee country the year before it reports a greater one in 7 towns of Otsego & Delaware -

A letter dated in Oct. of the same year from a Miss. in another part of the same county states that the people employ the Sabbath in hunting & fishing horse racing & that many children of 14 years old had no knowledge of their Creator -

10 A letter of Oct. 1800 from a Presb. in Ontario Co ~~Lets~~ gives us something very important in relation to the progress of churches in the Western dist. In 1800 the Co of Ontario comprehended ½ of the Western Territory & contained a popula-tion of 12,580 - & Mr Williston writes that in 1799 there was but one Congregational or Presbyt. Ch. in that wh. had a Pastor & that he was dismissed about that time that in the same Co there was another Ch the church of 30 members - & that there were all the Pedo Baptist Churches in the County in Jan 1799 - in two churches with about 60 members - He writes further that in Oct 1800 there were in the same Co. 9 churches 280 members & 8 settled ministers & it is added - "these are the fruits of an outpouring of the Sp. wh took place the year before -

A letter of Autumn 1802 states that in the Black River Country 150 miles p. Albany there were 15 churches within the compass of 100 miles, destitute of min-isters & that many of them would be able to support them if they were united in

sentiment – Letters from all quarters a-
bout this time & for many years after-
wards, notice the inroads of sectarians & in-
fidels of every description – Universalists Le-
cinians – Deists, Chrystians, & followers of Semin
dwellenson, dividing, enfeebling – & in some
instances annihilating the little establish
ments which had been organised by the la
bours of former missionaries – Here I would
remark that the district had now been un
der missionary cultivation upwards of 10 years
churches had been organised through the
whole extent of that country – & from that
time labourers were employed to supply
churches destitute of ministers, ~~other~~ &
not a land destitute of churches –
In 1802 the Military grants which lie
the middle of the district, a tract of 70
miles in length & 50 in breadth, contain
ed 30000 inhabitants – At that time there
was one minister of the Dutch Reformed Ch
& a number of Baptist Elders – but not
ones of Congregational or Presbyterian order
amongst this population of 30000 – But
in June of the following year 3 congrega

12) tional preachers were instituted in these
counties—

I shall now pass on to accounts of a later period, & then wind up with some details ~~which illustrate the present state~~ which shew that the dist. was lamentably destitute ~~for years~~ two or 3 years ago, & that unless its wants have been most miraculously ~~watched~~ supplied since that time, the call for missionary labours is very urgent still—

In the Autumn of 1803 the Presbytery of Geneva, the first in those parts was formed & then consisted of only 3 ministers—

By a return made to the General Assembly in 1808 it appears that the Presbytery of Onida — the second in the district, had been formed—

In the year 1810 though a time of general stupidity in the western churches — 12 ordinations took place in a few counties of the district, one of which in Genesee Co. was

the first instance of Congregational ordination that had been known west of the Genesee River -

A letter of 1811 from Delaware County reported from Ct Co. of Albany by a tract of about 30 miles gives us a picture of that region, not more lamentable than surprising - It tells of 24 families who had lived together in a neighbourhood for 10 years, & during that time had never heard a sermon - of one young woman who had been a hopeful convert about 7 years, who had never seen the Sacraments administered, nor been where there was an organized church -

At this time it is estimated that 100 candidates would not supply the new settlements in the state of N. York -

In 1815 - the Synod of Genesee ~~to which~~ with which ~~and the part of~~ almost all the western Presbyterian churches in the W. St. were at that time connected - had 3 Presbyteries - 52 ministers - & 69 congregations 33 of wh. were vacant - & of these 13 were unable to support ministers

I H not united —

At this time in the counties of Alleg. & Stu-
ben which contained 40 000 inhabitants, but which were
ben which were the newest & least popu-
lous parts of the country, there were in the for-
mer but 3 settled ministers & in the latter
but one of the Presbyterian Confession order — The
Co. adjoining Alleghany on the west was
not only destitute of stated preaching, but
had never yet received any missionary
aid — It was likewise estimated that the
proportion of settled ministers in other parts
of the country was not greater than in these
Counties —

In 1816 — there were many & powerful revivals
of Religion in the western Country — such as have
seldom been seen any where —

At Parma Rice & Murray in Genesee Co. —
In Cayuga Co. at Auburn where upwards of 200
were added to the Church at Owasco where
it was supposed the the Presbyterians & Bap-
tists counted 800 converts — Ste Locke 170 —
In Homer where 160 were added to the Church
& several other towns — In several towns of
Chenango Co — & in 30 towns of Otsego Co —
The spirit of missions wh. had been declining
was now revived, & plans were brought to
light which gave a new spring to the exertions

of missionary societies—

It was found that in an extent of territory including ~~the~~ a quarter of the state of N. Y— ~~there were probably not~~ with a population of 70 or 80000 souls, there were not more than 6 Gospel ministers— This account however refers rather to the northern part of the state including however 2 Counties of the West Dt—

In a district of 80 miles in length & 40 in br. in the Co's of Oneida & Oswego & containing 50000 souls, there were but two settled ministers— In a route of about 80 miles between Utica & Oswego embracing a population of from 15 to 20000, there was but one settled minister— In the Counties of Genesee Niagara Alleghany Cattaraugus & Chatauque containing a population of from 60 to 70 thousand there were but 5 settled ministers— And what rendered the case very trying to the Missionary, was that the people were so sensible of their perishing condition that his greatest difficulty was in getting their consent to go from them to labour among others—

In 1810— a great number of missionaries were employed in the western Dt & they all concur in

recommending the parts which they visited to the benevolence & sympathy of P.C. Societies - as places not only lamentable destitute - but where from the influence which religious institution had already gained upon the dispositions of the peoples, there was every prospect of success to future labourers - In many places there had been recent revivals of Rel - Many persons were found deeply solicitous on the subject of salvation - In almost every settlement visited, there were members anxious by inquiring, but more to direct - They held meetings regularly on the Lords day for reading - & conference through the week - the sight of a Missionary would draw forth tears of joy - & at his departure they would beseech him with tears to represent their situation to other Societies - & in all those places which they had prepared for the reception of the true doctrine sectaries of all kinds abounded - & were engaged with persevering activity in imposing the awakened mind with the delusions of Socinianism - Universalism or Chrystianism -

These remarks are applicable to St Lawrence & Warren Counties ~~also~~ but particularly to the Holland purchase in the Western part of the State — the people here are making great exertions to support a ministry — One of Connecticut Missionaries informs us that the people of this region were so anxious to lengthen out the time of his mission wh. was 6 weeks that they contributed a dozen to double it

~~What I shall now~~

In 1819 — Jan — the Co. of Oswego extending 60 miles on Lake Ontario & 20 south. including 9000 inhabitants — has only 2 settled Presbyt. clergymen — & these churches ~~are~~ ~~recently formed~~ are recent. & are small & needy —

The tract of country extending from Seneca to Niagara River & from the great Western road to Lake Ontario about 150 miles in length & 40 in breadth — in this tract there are 40 Presbr or Congl churches one half of which have been formed within 3 years — & 15 settled ministers — A few of the destitute churches are able to provide themselves for a part of the time

with preaching - but generally they are needy & unless supported by missionary aid they will languish - but with this help they will probably increase & new ones be formed - The churches & also many of those who make no profession of religion rejoice to have missionaries sent to them & manifest their joy by their attendance on the word preached & their kind attention to Missionaries -

From the Report of the Geneva Synod, Feb. 1819 it appears, that in the extensive Region of Niagara Presbt embraces - (110 miles by 50) numerous churches have been collected. & a special attention to religion distinguishes several towns - The increase of the number of churches & ministers of the Gospel, within the bounds of this Synod for a few years past, is perhaps without a parallel -

The Presbytery of Geneva was formed in 1805 & consisted of 3 ministers -*

In 1805 the Synod of Geneva numbered 3 Presbyteries 12 ministers & 69 Congregations -

* but it included that district of country which is now represented in the Synod of Genesee

In 1819 the Same Synod contained 8 Presbyteries
92 Presbyterian ministers - 11 licentiates - 143
Presbyterian congregations & 8000 communicants.
~~In the~~ within the last year 191 adults & 1099
infants have been baptised - & 1018 have been
added to the number of communicants -
I would remark that ~~the Synod~~ 4 or 5 counties of the western district are
not included in the Synod So
within the same ~~district~~ limits the Baptists
have, as well as I can estimate, 198 con-
gregations 138 ministers - 15574 communi-
cants - & have baptised 1674 during the
year past -

Wm Jones

August 1. 1819